



**REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE NORMAN Y. MINETA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

**2004 SAFETY BELT USE SURVEY ANNOUNCEMENT
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON**

**SEPTEMBER 16, 2004
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Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Dr. Frederick Rivara, head of the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center, for that kind introduction and for welcoming us to Harborview. This outstanding medical facility is crucial to our efforts to reduce traffic fatalities in several ways.

Many crash victims owe their lives directly to the emergency room care that they received here, and Harborview's Center for Advanced Reconstruction and Rehabilitation has helped put many shattered lives back together.

In addition to the immediate medical attention and rehabilitative services that the hospital provides, the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center collects data on both crashes and patients involved in crashes. That information helps manufacturers design safer cars and safer trucks, and the data help us, at the U.S. Department of Transportation, to formulate better safety policies.

One of the most important things that we have learned from the data that we have collected over the years is that safety belts save lives. The statistics tell us that each percentage point increase in the number of Americans who buckle up translates into 270 lives saved annually.

We know that is true. Every day, almost anywhere in America, you hear stories of drivers and passengers who were able to walk away from a terrible crash, their lives spared because they were wearing their safety belts.

So when President Bush charged me with doing everything possible to save lives on our Nation's roadways, we determined that a key strategy would be to get more Americans to buckle up. We set a goal of 78 percent, and last year we exceeded it.

Today, however, I am here to announce that we have reached another important milestone here in 2004: Safety belt use across the United States is now at 80 percent — a

record high. This 80 percent use rate will save 15,200 lives and prevent 50 billion dollars in economic costs every year.

To appreciate just how far we have come, look back to 1994, when this national safety belt use survey was first conducted. The usage rate was only 58 percent. In the past four years, safety belt use has increased steadily, from 71 percent in 2000, to 80 percent this year.

It's no coincidence that, with 8 out of 10 Americans wearing their safety belts, we also have achieved the lowest traffic fatality rate on our Nation's highways since record-keeping began 29 years ago.

President Bush has said that, in the end, what matters is results, and these are life-saving results. Our unprecedented focus on highway safety has produced a record high percentage of Americans wearing their safety belts, and a record low fatality rate.

Many, many people have worked hard to get us to this point.

Leading the effort at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is its able, dedicated, and passionate Administrator, Dr. Jeff Runge.

Senator Patty Murray, thank you for supporting the President by helping to secure funds for the advertising campaign that is getting out the safety belt message.

Law enforcement is a critical partner. Lowell Porter, Chief of the Washington State Patrol, thank you for being here today and for your strong commitment to saving lives.

While today's announcement is a major accomplishment, there is still more work to be done. We still have too many Americans dying on our roads, and too many Americans still are not wearing their safety belts. So we're going to keep up the pressure. To those who think that we can't do any better, I would tell them to look at the state of Washington, where the safety belt use rate for 2004 is 94.2 percent.

In fact, the state of Washington leads the continental United States in its percentage of people buckling up, and I'd like to say thanks to my very good friend, Governor Gary Locke.

Because 94.2 percent of the people here in Washington appreciate the importance of wearing their safety belts, 280 lives will be spared, 7,800 injuries will be prevented, and \$1.2 billion in economic costs will be saved in 2004.

Today, Washington State is an example for states across the Nation. One reason that this state has been successful is that Washington has good laws on the books. In fact, Washington's safety belt use rate shot up 10 percentage points after the legislature adopted, and Governor Locke signed, the primary safety belt law in 2002.

States like Washington have helped the Bush Administration raise the national safety belt use rate to 80 percent for the first time in history across the country.

Safety remains a top priority, and we need everyone □ citizens, law enforcement, health and traffic-safety professionals □ working together toward an even higher national safety belt use rate in the future, because safety belts really do save lives.

Thank you for joining us today, and travel safely.

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